

Fomitopsis pinicola: a fungus to look out for

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I came across this fungus in Sperrall Park near Studley, Warwickshire on April 11th 2020, at grid reference SP102629. I did not know what it was, but it looked interesting and quite striking. Photographs were taken (01 to 03). At home with the help of books and internet resources I concluded that it might be *Fomitopsis pinicola* (common English name of Red-belted Bracket). However, this species is regarded as rare in the UK, although less so in continental Europe and north America. The NBN Atlas lists only 49 records in the UK, none of them near the West Midlands. So, I was tentative and passed the photos across to John Bingham for an opinion. He was doubtful that it was *Fomitopsis* but could not decide what it was.

I sent the photos across to Dr Martyn Ainsworth, one of the Kew fungi expert team. He came swiftly back to confirm the specimen as *Fomitopsis pinicola*. I thought it might be a first record for the West Midlands, but this idea was soon squashed. Further correspondence led me into contact with John Roberts who had first recorded *Fomitopsis* in Warwickshire on 22nd October 2017 at a site in Leamington Spa. Martyn Ainsworth told me that it has been recorded further south in recent years. So, it was a good tick for me, but not such a big tick in the world of Mycology.

My record is, however, interesting with respect to what it was growing on. As the specific name suggests this is a fungus with a preference for conifers. According to the Wikipedia entry on the species it is an important component in the decay of old timber, but it does not kill living trees. However, it is thought to serve an important ecological function in influencing successional changes in forests in some temperate regions of the northern hemisphere. All sources seem to suggest that *Fomitopsis* is rare on deciduous trees. The record from near Leamington is on decaying timber that had already fallen but the tree species could not be identified, but they are likely to be deciduous. A further specimen was found at the same site in March 2020 growing on birch.



01. *Fomitopsis pinicola* Red-belted Bracket. Graham Martin.



02. *Fomitopsis pinicola* Red-belted Bracket. Graham Martin.



03. *Fomitopsis pinicola* Red-belted Bracket. Graham Martin.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of my record is what it was growing on. It was a small specimen compared to the dimensions given in the texts, a bracket of less than 30 mm across compared with records of specimens of 300 – 400 mm, so a relatively young specimen (the bracket is persistent and enlarges over the years). Remarkably, it was growing on a tree stake, with a square section of 32 mm, indicating that the stake is of soft wood.

The stake was attached to a tree tube which had been protecting a young hornbeam. But the stake had broken off at ground level and the tube was horizontal. However, the angle of growth of the bracket indicated that the stake had fallen only recently. Sperrall Park is part of the Heart of England Forest estate, and I was able to get a rough idea of the provenance of the stake from their head forester, Stephen Coffey. He could not be sure of the exact source but confirmed that it was most likely to be softwood which had been

harvested from forests around the Baltic. This suggests that the fungus had come in with the cut timber. Martyn Ainsworth reported that he has received records of this fungus growing on fence posts in southern England. It appears therefore that this fungus could become more frequently recorded in the UK.

Having found this specimen, I now find it difficult to walk past any tree stake without making a quick inspection. It could become an obsession. It seems that wherever you are it is worth keeping an eye out for this attractive fungus: it could be on the next fence post or tree stake or you might find it on a fallen tree.

My record has been reported to the iRecord web site and so should eventually make its way to the NBN Atlas. The record number in their database is 13226201, should you wish to look it up.

Foot Note

Brett Westwood

This fungus persists at Ribbesford Wood where it grows on birch (04). It was identified by John Bingham who showed it to a Wyre Study Group meeting. I've checked it out many times since.



04. *Fomitopsis pinicola* on birch, Ribbesford Wood. Brett Westwood.

References

NB Atlas web site. Available at <https://nbnatlas.org>.

iRecord web site. Available at <https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord>.

Images

01.. *Fomitopsis pinicola* Red-belted Bracket. Graham Martin.

02. *Fomitopsis pinicola* Red-belted Bracket. Graham Martin.

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04. *Fomitopsis pinicola* on birch, Ribbesford Wood. Brett Westwood.